

Details on the Protest for Democracy at Tiananmen Square

The Call for Political Reform

- During the first 10 years of Deng Xiaoping's rule, people expressed a desire to have political reforms coincide with the successful economic reforms. In 1978 people created posters criticizing the government and attached them to a wall in Beijing, known as Democracy Wall. In 1986 thousands of students protested for democracy in the cities of Hefei, Wuhan, and Shanghai. The communist government usually stopped these protests by simply arresting a few key leaders.

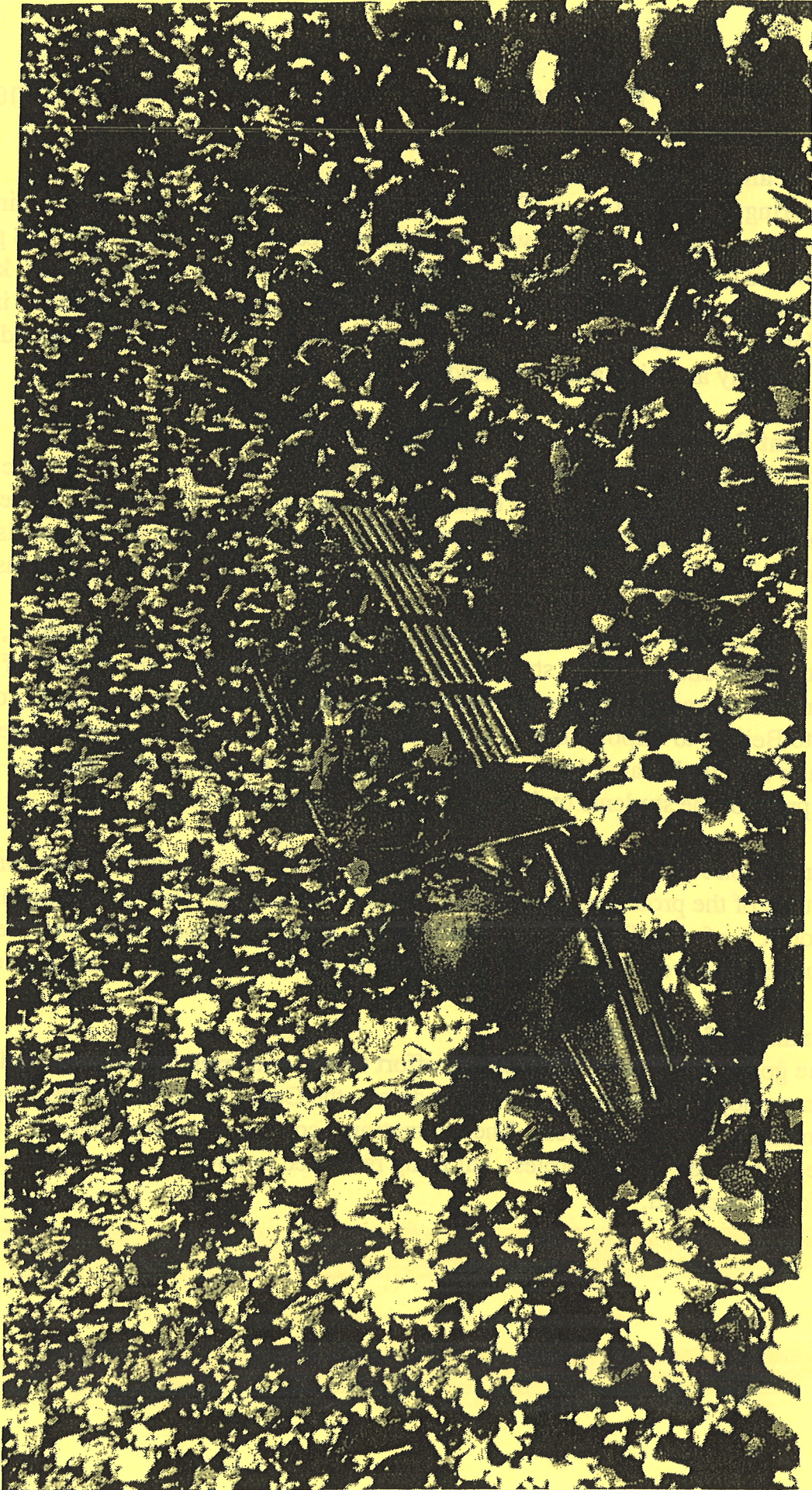
Student Protest for Democracy at Tiananmen Square

- In April 1989 students held a protest at Tiananmen Square, the main public square in the capital city of Beijing. They demanded that the government consider some political reforms, such as freedom of the press. When the government refused to discuss these initial demands, students began protesting for more radical reforms, such as democracy.
- In the first few weeks, the government did little to stop the demonstrations, even as some students went on hunger strikes as acts of protest. Finally, after a month of protest and an enormous amount of international attention, the communist government ordered troops into Beijing to impose martial law (military rule over civilians). Troops were unable to enter the city because local citizens—estimated at as many as two million—showed their support of the students by blocking the advance of the troops.
- Finally, on June 3, 1989, Deng called in the army the second time to use force to clear the square of the protesters, which it did, killing between 700 and 3,000 citizens. Although the protest is often called the Tiananmen Square Massacre, most of the dead were actually not students and were killed while soldiers were fighting their way to the square.

Aftermath of the Protest

- The government made a systematic effort to find and arrest the student leaders of the democracy movement. Some top leaders in the Communist Party were also cast aside as sympathizers of the protest. The international community voiced outrage at the result of the Tiananmen Square protest, but Deng remained in power, and no political reforms occurred.

Picture Representing the Protest for Democracy at Tiananmen Square



Here we see Red Army troops meeting resistance from the citizens of Beijing as they attempt to march into Tiananmen Square in May 1989.